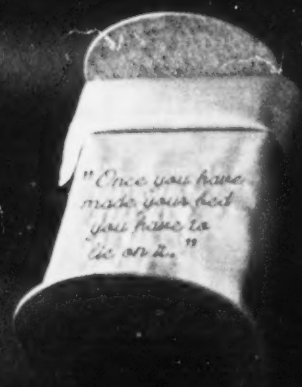
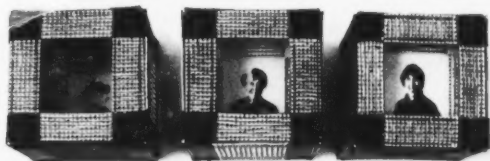


MOTHERS • DAUGHTERS •

Recent Work by Alexandra McCurdy

SUSAN MACALPINE FOSHAY, CURATOR





McCurdy's work...has long involved both a rejection of the ceramic norm, and a quite literal 'deconstruction' of ceramic form, and its associated traditions and techniques. No wonder, then, that she has also long gone outside of ceramic tradition, theory, and technique in search of approaches and ideas that had no part at all in the making of the status quo of clay as it currently exists.¹

It is no accident that Alexandra McCurdy uses textiles as a source material for her ceramic work, and, in particular, for the *Mothers/Daughters* body of work she has created. It is a body of work inspired by McCurdy's lifelong interest in pattern (influenced by her mother's patterns and designs for the post World War II British textiles industry), by grieving the death of her mother in 1999, and by the marriage of her only daughter in 2000. It seems quite natural that these events would be reflected in the work that followed, but there was to be an additional twist to McCurdy's creative process.

Spending four months of the year in Florida, McCurdy rents from and shares studio space with a printmaker - a studio lacking many of the tools which outfit her ceramic studio spaces here at home in Nova Scotia. It is, however, a fully equipped studio for making prints. Without a potter's wheel, McCurdy began the piercing and weaving of porcelain slabs that we see in her *S.O.S. (Sources of Support)* series created for the 1998 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. These quilt-like wall hangings on which she has mastered the art of silk screening images on porcelain tiles and which are composed of individual tiles adjoined with waxed linen and embroidery floss, are an overt representation of the quotidian yet indispensable items of McCurdy's life.

Intrigued by the printing process, textiles and text, and dealing with complex issues of life, death, and change, McCurdy pondered several generations of women in her family, most specifically her mother, herself and her daughter. (McCurdy's granddaughter arrived in 2003.) And given that her Masters thesis for the Cardiff Institute of Higher Education in Wales in which she examines historical attitudes towards women and craft, particularly textiles², and the necessity of rethinking both process and product, McCurdy launched into the synthesis of all predominant factors feeling that she was facing enormous risk. No stranger to the autobiographical and overt domestic message in both form and content of her work, McCurdy, eschewing her formal training in the ceramics department of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, began the labourious process she had set out for herself, applying her narrative to the green ware with an emulsion of under glaze or Mason's stain and plate oil (a formula developed out of the necessity to create work under extenuating circumstances), as the piece required: no lustrous glazes, no application of ornamentation, but a transforming of materials nonetheless. Whether with the porcelain boxes with images or imprinted fingerprints, the panels and beds of the brides, or the prints on paper, the changes effected on her materials are as irreversible as those of the earlier firing of her porcelain pots.

Take as example the lingerie prints in which we see the kind of underwear customarily worn by her mother, herself and her daughter but presented by McCurdy on a two-dimensional plane. On one level, they are both mildly amusing and eccentric while, on another level, they are an excruciating metaphor for women and their weight issues...never thin enough and, as a result, willing to subject ourselves to the discomforts imposed by fashion. I wince looking at these works as I imagine the inked plate of the printer's press exerting thousands of pounds of pressure on these garments to impress them upon their substrate.

Consider the porcelain fingerprint boxes which bring to mind little hope chests, recipe boxes, or reliquary boxes. Or the porcelain panels and beds of *The Brides* which is a literal representation of the weddings of the three subjects and which incorporates porcelain and quilts on which maxims have been stitched. Or the paper clay³ houses which are again literal representations of the houses of mother, artist, and daughter and suggest the comfort and security of home and the solidarity of the female members of McCurdy's family.

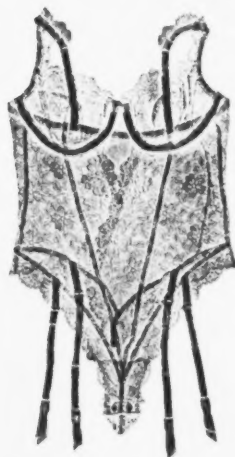
Extrapolating from Paul Mathieu's comment that pottery accumulates time and preserves it⁴, McCurdy, both in

and on porcelain and on paper, indelibly preserves her deeply personal narrative and observations of women and what has callously been considered women's work, and presents it, not as a beautiful or even functional object, but as an emotive and defining statement. This, as a colleague⁵ of mine suggested, is artist as storyteller.

Whatever her chosen vehicle of expression, McCurdy's unconventional use of the conventional materials of potters and printmakers manifests her exploration of the issues meaningful to her. She is a storyteller, and anthropologist. She is foremost an artist who clearly welcomes the challenges that her circumstances determine.

Susan MacAlpine Foshay

- 1 Gil McElroy, "Gravity and Grace: Thinking About The Ceramics Of Alexandra McCurdy", *Alexandra McCurdy: S.O.S. (Sources of Support)*, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 1998.
- 2 Alexandra McCurdy, *Women and Craft: A Study of Power*, MA Degree in 3D Design - Ceramics, Cardiff Institute of Higher Education, 1992.
- 3 clay to which paper has been added for additional strength
- 4 Paul Mathieu, "The Space of Pottery: An Investigation of the Nature of Craft", *A Discussion of Meaning in Contemporary Craft*, Gloria Hickey, ed., Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1994.
- 5 Barbara Hill-Taylor



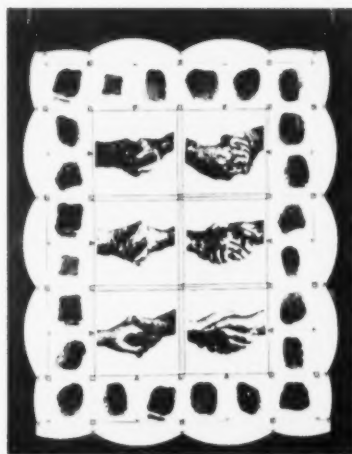
Under Wraps 6 2002 75.6cm x 51cm
relief print on paper

Born in 1944 in Worcestershire, England, **Alexandra McCurdy** trained as a ceramist at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1980. She went on to attend the Cardiff Institute of Higher Education in Wales, graduating with a Masters Degree in 3D Design—Ceramics, in 1991. Over the years, she has been an active member of Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council, serving currently as a Director, and was the Ceramics Curator at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. She has most recently had a solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, which traveled to the Charlottetown Centre of the Arts in Prince Edward Island and to the Burlington Art Centre in Burlington, Ontario. Alexandra's ceramics are included in numerous public collections, including the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza, Italy, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Nova Scotia Museum, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the Burlington Art Centre and the Art Bank of Nova Scotia. She has had frequent reviews and articles written in periodicals about her work, including the prestigious *Ceramics: Art and Perception* from Australia, *American Ceramics* and *Ceramics Monthly* from the U.S.A., *Contact* magazine from Canada and *Arts Atlantic* from the Maritimes. Last year, she had work included in the *Genius Loci* invitational exhibition at the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery in Waterloo, Ontario, the *Fireworks 2003*, and the *Fireworks 2000/2001* juried touring exhibitions organised by Fusion: the Ontario Clay and Glass Association, as well as *Art Focus*, a juried exhibition in Bonita

Spring, Florida. As well, she had a solo exhibition at the George Gardiner Museum Shop and is currently showing at Jonathon Bancroft-Snell Interiors, both in Ontario.

Susan MacAlpine Foshay graduated from the University of Pennsylvania (MA) in 1983 and has since worked extensively in the visual arts in Nova Scotia; as art consultant, gallery owner (YHZ Halifax Contemporary Art Gallery and xportfolio) and independent curator (1997 – present), and as Exhibitions Curator at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (1987-1997). Foshay has served on boards, committees and peer juries of several Nova Scotia arts organizations and institutions, and is the recipient of the 2003 Atlantic Craft Award of Excellence for Industry Leader/Supporter granted annually by the governments of the four Atlantic Provinces.

The Ties that Bind 2000 82cm x 64cm
porcelain, embroidery floss, wooden dowel



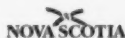
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Our Houses 2003 26cm x 26cm (each)
porcelain, wire

Front cover:

The Brides 2002

46cm x 19cm (brides)

18cm x 16.5cm x 29cm (beds)

porcelain, linen fabric, embroidery floss



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Measurements are in centimetres, height preceding width.

Family, 1999

porcelain, embroidery floss, wooden dowel
84x53

The Ties That Bind, 2000

porcelain, embroidery floss, wooden dowel
82x64

Hands, 2000

relief print on paper (4)
33x50.5 each

Bas Relief of Hands, 2000

porcelain (2)
18x27 each

Under Wraps, 2000

relief print on paper (6)
76.5x51 (6)

Oral History: Threads of Tradition, 2001

porcelain, embroidery floss, wooden dowel
76x51

Mothers, 2001

porcelain, waxed linen, beads
100x18.5

Daughters, 2001

porcelain, waxed linen, beads
100x18.5

You Reap What You Sew, 2001

relief print on paper (2)
33x50.5 each

The Brides, 2002

porcelain, wire (brides)
46x19
porcelain, linen fabric, embroidery floss (beds)
18x16.5x29

Thinking Outside the Box, 2002

porcelain, wire, beads (3)
12x12 each

Our Houses, 2003

porcelain, wire (3)
26x26 each

Hanky, 2003

relief print on paper (4)
38x51 each

Print Boxes, 2003

porcelain (3)
10x13 each

